

**AMERICAN RED CROSS BUILDING  
SCULPTURE AND PLAZA**

2025 E Street, NW  
Washington, D.C.

Report to the American Red Cross

December 6, 2001

---

***Abstract***

The American Red Cross has submitted revised final site development plans for the installation of a sculpture and a plaza with seating on the southeast corner of the site of its new headquarters building at 2025 E Street, NW. The Commission approved the building and another plaza configuration at its September 2, 1999 meeting. The proposed marble and granite sculpture is intended to enhance the identity and image of the new American Red Cross Headquarters Building.

***Authority***

Public Law 100-637 (American National Red Cross, District of Columbia Chapter, Leasing of Real Property – November 3, 1988).

---

***Commission Action***

The Commission approves the revised final site development plans for the installation of a sculpture and plaza at the southeast corner of the site of the new American Red Cross Headquarters Building, 2025 E Street, NW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 23.00(38.00)-40875.

\* \* \*

## **BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION**

### *DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL*

The American Red Cross (ARC) proposes placing a sculpture by artist Larry Kirkland at the southeast corner of the site of its new headquarters building, currently under construction. The sculpture would rest on a paved plaza with a low seating wall on two sides. The plaza would be accessible by the public from the sidewalk. Low lighting would focus on the sculpture, the underside of the tree canopy, and the walkways. Trees and shrubbery would be planted at the corner of the site to enhance the building as well as the sculpture.

Public Law 100-637 authorized ARC to construct the building on the site and required that the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts approve the plans for the building and other site improvements. For the proposed project, the Commission also served as the lead federal agency for the purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.

### Site

- The site of the new ARC headquarters building at 2025 E Street is the southern half of the square bounded by E, F, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> Streets, NW. The northern half of the square is occupied by apartment buildings and the area south of the site contains numerous federal office buildings, including the Department of State, Federal Reserve Board, and Office of Personnel Management. Immediately to the south of the site is parkland and the highway ramps associated with the E Street expressway. The federal enclave is known as the Northwest Rectangle.
- The Commission gave final approval for the new headquarters building on September 2, 1999, and the building is now under construction. Plazas at the southeast and southwest corners of the site were included in the approval. The building will be entered from the center of the south façade, a rebuilt section of the historic building previously on the site.
- The sculpture would be placed on the paved plaza at the southeast corner of the site. That plaza was planned for seating and a future work of art. Now that the sculpture is designed, the proposed plaza is larger in size and different in configuration than that originally approved by the Commission. The plans for landscaping the reconfigured southeast corner are also part of the current application.
- The plaza, of precast concrete pavers with low granite walls and copings, would measure 43'9" by 43'9". It could be approached either from the E Street sidewalk by several steps or from the 20<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalk by an accessible ramp. The plaza would be surrounded on the two inner edges by low seating. Built-in low level ground lighting would accent the two walkways, the trees, and the sculpture itself.

- The landscape plan for the southeast corner of the site specifies the planting of Saucer Magnolias, Needlepoint Ivy, and Spreading English Yew bushes.

### Sculpture

- Artist Larry Kirkland's inspiration for the sculpture is the image of the Red Cross flag. The inscription is the Nurse's Creed. The proposed sculpture consists of two pieces that comprise the flag. The more prominent piece is the white portion of the flag, a long curved white Carrara marble wall. The red cross, of red granite, is removed from the flag wall and sits 9'9" behind the wall opening so that visitors can pass through the "flag" to the red cross. The two paths to the plaza encourage visitors or passers-by to walk into the plaza and through the sculpture. The inscriptions will appear on the back of the sculpture wall, not on the side facing the street corner.
- ARC's first submission for the sculpture (not seen by the Commission) was for a much larger work of art. The proposed flag wall measured approximately 18' high by 32' long. The red granite cross was 13' 6" high and 13'6" wide.
- Following consultation with the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board, the D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer, and interested parties in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood, the ARC reduced the size of the sculpture. That proposal was scheduled for Commission review at its July 2001 meeting but was withdrawn by the applicant.
- Following a full-scale mock-up of the proposed sculpture on site, Mr. Kirkland has extended the length of the subsequently reduced sculpture by 2' (without extending any of the other dimensions).
- The proposed dimensions, as shown in the current submission, are as follows: The flag wall would measure 13' high, 24'9" long, and 3'3" wide at its fullest point. The opening in the wall would have the same dimensions as the red granite cross: each axis of the cross would be 9'9" long and 3'3" wide. The horizontal axis of both the wall opening and the red cross would measure between 3'3" and 6'6" above the plaza level.

### *PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION*

At its September 2, 1999 meeting, the Commission approved the final site and building plans for the ARC's new headquarters building. At that time, the Commission indicated that it looked forward to reviewing the landscape plans for the public reservations south of the project site, in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement. Those plans, for the area near the E Street expressway, are to be implemented within six months of the ARC's occupation of the building.

## *COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS*

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the proposed sculpture at its original size at its November 2000 meeting. CFA has confirmed that the proposed reduction does not require further review.

## *EVALUATION*

ARC's proposal to locate a signature work of public art at its new headquarters building is commendable. The proposed sculpture would enhance the building's institutional and architectural identity. Previously, the site's primary identity was the ARC Chapter House, which, with its green setting, became a visual landmark. With the changes to the site now underway as a result of the demolition and new construction, the new sculpture would serve as a landmark.

The proposed sculpture complements the architectural style of the new building and is designed to appeal to both ARC visitors and to passers-by. The sculptor intends for people to interact with the two pieces. The design of the plaza further encourages people to walk through the sculpture or sit at the perimeter to enjoy it.

Attached to this report are two photographs taken of the full-scale mock-up of the sculpture at the site. Staff finds the proposed sculpture to be appropriate for the building and the corner of the site. The two pieces are scaled so that people will interact comfortably with them. The sculpture is designed primarily on a 3'3" module, each block of white marble and red granite comprising one module, with the terminating modules lengthened to emphasize the attenuation of the white marble element. The cross opening is scaled so that a person can walk through or pass through in a wheelchair. The width of the wall opening is 3'3" (or 39"); a wheelchair requires 32" for passage.

Staff commends the artist on his conception. The sculpture will be a handsome addition to ARC's new headquarters and a public amenity. The staff recommends approval of the preliminary and final site development plans.

## Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on December 6, 2000, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the Department of Public Works; the General Services Administration; and the National Park Service. For information, the staff presented a revised design to the Coordinating Committee on June 6, 2001. The staff determined that a third review by the Coordinating Committee was not necessary for the December 6, 2001 Commission meeting.

### National Historic Preservation Act

In February of 1999, GSA, the Commission, and other parties signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to address mitigation of the demolition of the ARC Chapter House, a building determined to contribute to a National Register-eligible Northwest Rectangle Historic District. The new ARC headquarters is now being constructed on the site.

The Northwest Rectangle is a partially realized plan to provide additional offices for the federal government in a complex similar to the Federal Triangle of the previous generation. Developed primarily in the 1930s and 1940s, the Northwest Rectangle comprises the federal office buildings generally west of the White House. The Commission and its chairman, Ulysses S. Grant III, were driving forces behind this planned complex.

The historic ARC Chapter House has been demolished and a section of it, including part of the front façade, has been incorporated in the design of the new building. As the building no longer retains its historic integrity, the determination of effect of the proposed sculpture was made for the purposes of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act in the context of the potential historic district.

NCPC served as the lead federal agency for the Section 106 review of the proposed sculpture and plaza. The Executive Director determined that the proposed sculpture and plaza, which was reduced in size through consultation with interested members of the public, would not have an adverse effect on the potential Northwest Rectangle Historic District. The proposal would not adversely affect the historic and architectural character of the enclave of large federal office buildings, nor further adversely affect, beyond the alterations already approved for the site, the character of the original partially realized plan for the Northwest Rectangle.

In addition to consulting with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Executive Director also invited the original interested parties for the consultation on the construction of the new building to comment on the sculpture proposal. Citizens spoke at both the April and May 2001 meetings of the D.C. Historic Preservation Board, asking for the sculpture to be reduced in size.

The DC State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the Executive Director's determination of No Adverse Effect, provided that the sculpture and paved plaza were reduced in size to reflect the recommendations of the Historic Preservation Review Board and the comments of the public.

The DC SHPO staff has subsequently affirmed that the DC State Historic Preservation Officer's prior approval covered the proposed modest increase in the length of the white marble wall and that the current proposal was consistent with the DC SHPO's negotiated reduction in the size of the sculpture from the original ARC proposal.

### National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, an Environmental Assessment Supplement (EAS) was prepared in January 1999 for the new ARC Headquarters site. The EAS evaluation determined an environmental impact statement was not required for the project. The NCPC subsequently completed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on March 24, 1999.

Staff review of the previous FONSI finds no environmental issues evaluated by the EAS that are affected by the proposed sculpture and plaza. Consequently, staff finds the completed FONSI is valid and remains in effect.

### Comprehensive Plan

The proposed sculpture would be located on the southeast corner of the building site and also would be located adjacent to a designated Special Place in the Preservation and Historic Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. An applicable policy in this element specifies:

The existing street space and the buildings fronting on Special Streets and Places should be maintained, protected, and enhanced. Any repair, maintenance, improvement or new buildings should respect the historic elements, enhance the aesthetic quality, and promote the amenity of this space.

The scale and siting of the proposed sculpture are compatible with the unique character of the adjacent Special Place and are consistent with this policy.